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C O N F I D E N T I A L SOFIA 000577

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [MARR](#) [BU](#)

SUBJECT: BULGARIA: DEFENSE MINISTER ASKS FOR STRUCTURED
DIALOGUE ON MISSILE DEFENSE

REF: SOFIA 528

Classified By: CDA John Ordway for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: The Bulgarian government has expressed strong public support for the new U.S. direction on European-based missile defense. Privately, Defense Minister Mladenov requested that the United States and Bulgaria begin "structured talks" on Bulgaria's future role in the regional missile defense architecture. Countries like Bulgaria, at the "periphery of the alliance," are seriously concerned about the threat of Iranian missiles, he said. Some media outlets have noted that the presence of U.S. forces in Bulgaria make it a possible target for Iranian missiles. As a sign of the government's interest, Defense Minister Mladenov plans to travel to Washington October 29 - 31 to explore potential Bulgarian contributions to the plan. End Summary.

OFFICIAL REACTION

¶2. (C) The Bulgarian government supports the U.S. decision on European-based missile defense, and is interested to know whether Bulgaria might be a candidate location for future missile defense facilities and whether future missile defense systems would cover Bulgaria (reftel). On October 1, Valeri Ratchev, Chief of Staff of the Ministry of Defense, told the Defense Attache that Bulgaria would be open to hosting a interceptor site. In various conversations with high-level military contacts, the Defense Attache's office reported that the Bulgarian military has not expressed any concerns over the recent changes to U.S. thinking on missile defense.

MEDIA REACTION

¶3. (SBU) Daily newspapers, Trud and Standart, are already reporting that Bulgaria could be one of the possible locations for deployment of new American interceptor missiles. They also cited the Russian paper "Nezavisimaya Gazeta," quoting the former chief of staff of the Russian Federation Strategic Missile Force, General Victor Essin, saying, "Washington could deploy the new THAAD missile defense to Bulgaria and Romania." Standart also published a one-page interview with the Russian Director of Rosatom, Sergey Kiriyeenko, who when asked to comment on the possible co-existence of a Russian nuclear power plant and a U.S. anti-ballistic missile shield on Bulgarian territory, said that it would be an example of excellent cooperation between a NATO and a non-NATO member state.

¶4. (C) Comment: Prior to the announced changes to the missile defense plan, the Bulgarian government's main concern was being left outside of the area protected by the anti-missile

defense shield and forced to deal with an aggravated Russia. For Bulgaria, the new plan is a win-win: the Russians (rightly or wrongly) feel less threatened by the new roll-out plan and Bulgaria believes it is more likely to be covered sooner by the new arrangement. The Bulgarian government is eager to learn whether it would be covered during the first phase of the new plan and what role it could usefully play in the new missile defense architecture. The Minister of Defense is planning to travel Washington in late October and hopes to discuss this at highest levels in DOD. We strongly support this visit as Mladenov is an extremely competent forward-thinker who is looking to for ways to deepen cooperation with us on missile defense as well as on other pending issues, such as increased contributions in Afghanistan and expanding the role of our joint facilities in Bulgaria. End Comment.

ORDWAY